



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany (B) – 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

Focus: *For the Sake of the Gospel*

word of life

“I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.” (1 Corinthians 9:23 NRSV)

Read 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

Until this point in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, Paul has been focused on answering questions and responding to conflicts within their church. In chapter 9, Paul shifts his attention to the topic of apostleship, particularly his own understanding of being called as an apostle.

It might be helpful to skim through all of chapter 9 for an overview. Paul gladly serves as an apostle, one sent by Jesus Christ into the world. As an apostle, Paul takes delight in the opportunity to plant churches such as those found in Corinth. Despite their difficulties, Paul sees the church in Corinth as fruit of his labor.

1. *Who planted your church?*
2. *What might the church founders say about your church today?*

Paul reviews the rights and privileges of an apostle. This includes the right to receive compensation while proclaiming the gospel. An interesting shift occurs when in the middle of defending the right for compensation, Paul announces he will not be compensated. He does not want compensation to be a stumbling block for people who are trying to learn about Jesus Christ. (While in Corinth, Paul worked as a tentmaker as described in Acts 18:1-3)

3. *What do you think about compensating those who proclaim the Word of God?*
4. *How do you care for those who proclaim God’s Word to you?*

Paul writes, “No one will deprive me of my ground for boasting! If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!” (1 Corinthians 9:16 NRSV) Paul understands his apostleship as a commission from Christ; he freely accepts his calling to preach Jesus Christ.

On the one hand, he could boast in his calling, but the essence of his calling is from Christ. Thus, he can do no other than to point to God, the One who commissions him to preach and teach. Boasting is about God at work in our world.

5. *What does Paul mean when he says “woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel”?*
6. *Complete this phrase: “Woe to me if I do not . . .”*

Paul understands living in community from a perspective of freedom. He does not *have* to do anything. But his love for Christ and others shapes his choices and allows him to adapt to the circumstances. He does whatever it takes to relate to Jews, Gentiles, slaves, weak, strong, and so the list goes. He is free to meet people where they are. Paul adjusts his message of Christ to his audience. “I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.” (1 Corinthians 9:22 NRSV)

7. *How do you respond to Paul being so willing to be all things to all people?*
8. *What might be the danger of such flexibility?*
9. *Why is Paul so willing to adapt?*

word *among us*

We can learn much about Paul from his letters to the early church. Chapter nine lets us look at Paul's view of his calling as an apostle. He takes seriously his call as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Consequently, even though Paul is upset with the Corinthian church, he is also proud of them.

1. *How would you describe Paul?*
2. *How did Paul regard the role as an apostle of Jesus Christ?*

Take a few minutes to imagine Paul living today. Imagine him being put in charge of outreach for your congregation. In the first century, he is willing to go anywhere and be anything to reach his target audience. He is not constrained with patterns of the past, but allows his new-found freedom to take him to new locations and neighborhoods. Paul writes, "I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings." (1 Corinthians 9:22-23 NRSV)

3. *Describe what Paul and his ministry might look like today.*
4. *What area of your community would Paul visit?*
5. *What tools might he use in his ministry?*

Paul is deeply concerned that he does not become a stumbling block to others in faith. He feels commissioned by God to proclaim the gospel message. This commissioning by God in Christ is a driving force behind Paul's life.

6. *What can we learn from Paul?*
7. *When have you been concerned about being a stumbling block to others?*

faith practice in daily life

Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed

Paul is commissioned to preach. That is his calling. Not all have an opportunity to study at a seminary or preach to a congregation. Nevertheless, whether we have been to seminary or not, there are daily opportunities to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed.

Like Paul, Luther experienced a freedom in the gospel which allowed him to serve others. Luther writes, "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." (Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian*, 1520) We are freed from the bondage of sin, but we choose to serve others. That is the paradox of the Christian life.

8. *What does it mean to be a servant of all?*
9. *How does God free us to proclaim the good news through word and deed?*
10. *What does this mean for your daily life?*
11. *What do you want to remember from this lesson?*

Prayer

Christ, fill us with the passion of Paul. Free us to be your servants. Inspire us to do something for the sake of the gospel. Guide us so we are not stumbling blocks. In your name, we pray. Amen

last word

Do something this week
for the sake of the gospel.